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SUBJECT: GOB IN FINAL STAGES OF APPROVING NEW HUMAN RIGHTS
NGO

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1. (SBU) After a four month wait, the Bahraini Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) is expected to approve the establishment of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society within the next ten days. The board of the group, led by Shura Council member Faisal Foulad, includes women, unionists, Shias, Sunnis, a Christian, and a Jew. Foulad told PolOff November 17 that the group will operate independently of the government and will monitor human rights violations in the country and advocate reforms that support human rights. Al Ayam newspaper incorrectly reported that MOLSA had already approved the establishment of the society.

2. (SBU) Foulad said that the society will focus on monitoring the rights of women, children, and foreign workers, and will report on discrimination in all forms, especially religious discrimination. The society will seek to develop laws that support international agreements on human rights, particularly the UN Declaration on Human Rights. Foulad said his group has good relations with international and local NGOs and hoped that the GOB allows the Bahrain Center for Human Rights to re-open soon. Despite its name, the new organization has no formal association with Human Rights Watch.

3. (SBU) Comment: Foulad is an outspoken advocate for human rights who will work within the system to promote individual rights and prevent discrimination. As a member of the (appointed) Shura Council, he is in a position to influence government policy; however, others view him as too close to the regime to play an effective role. His organization is not intended to replace the closed and dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights, which was willing to push the envelope and, at times, provoked the ire of the GOB. But the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society is a welcome addition to the Kingdom's civil society scene.

MONROE